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ALEXANDRA SMITH

LEV TOLSTOY IN THE AGE OF KINOGLASNOST': MIKHAIL SHVEITSER'S *THE KREUTZER SONATA* AS A CRITIQUE OF RUSSIAN EROTIC UTOPIA AND SOVIET IDEOLOGY

At first glance, the 1987 film adaptation by Mikhail Shveitser and Sofia Milkina of Lev Tolstoy's controversial novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* (*Крейцерова соната*) — published in 1889 and censored on publication by the Russian authorities — seems at odds with the radical restructuring of the Soviet cinema industry triggered by Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms. In comparison with the upsurge of innovation and creativity during the Khrushchev thaw, which was the by-product of a general policy of liberalisation (albeit suppressed by the end of the 1960s),<sup>1</sup> the artistic revival of the Perestroika period was sustained by the Party and resulted in a radical restructuring of the cinema industry. The reshuffling of the administration comprised the replacement of the Minister of Culture and the removal of Goskino's conservative head Filipp Yermash, who was publicly blamed for the stagnation of Soviet cinema in the 1970s-80s. By 1987 Soviet censorship had been almost dismantled as an institution, but its final abolition came with the approval of the Law on the Press by the Supreme Soviet on 2 June 1990. It led to the creation of a free flow of information and the establishment of

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<sup>1</sup> David Gillespie's assessment of the literary developments of the 1960s is fully applicable to the Soviet film industry too. Gillespie writes: 'By the 1970s Russian literature was in dialogue with itself. Its soul had been profoundly affected by external events, such as the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the fall of Khrushchev in 1964 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and there was within the intelligentsia disillusion with the prospect of liberalization, often bordering with despair'. — Gillespie, David. 'Thaws, Freezes, and Wakes', in Cornwell, Neil (ed.), *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, London, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998, pp. 59-64, see p. 61.

many independent newspapers, film studios and publishing houses. In the minds of Soviet filmmakers the notions of glasnost and freedom of expression were interchangeable. According to Eduard Volodarsky's 1989 article, Soviet filmmakers welcomed glasnost and embraced the opportunity to make films about Soviet-era taboo subjects such as labour camps, corruption, drug addicts, prostitution, moral degradation of the army, and the mafia.<sup>2</sup> Taking account of how the chief focus of Soviet kinoglasnost' was on the exploration of Soviet-era taboo subjects, including de-Stalinisation, this article will examine Shveitser's adaptation of Tolstoy's story as a veiled critique of the exaggerated indulgence in violence that was manifested in the media, literature and film of the Gorbachev years. As will be argued below, Shveitser's film expresses concerns similar to Hanna Arendt's conceptualisation of the Nazis' crimes against humanity as an assault against thinking, as expressed in works such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>3</sup> and 'Reporter at Large: Eichmann in Jerusalem',<sup>4</sup> a series on the 1961 trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann. Similarly, Shveitser's film contains a semi-veiled criticism of the defenders of communist ideology and Socialist Realist dogma that led to the oppression of critical thinking, artistic experimentation and creative spontaneity.

Shveitser's film also conveys an anxiety about the excessive reproduction of revolutionary violence in a fetishised fashion through its obsessive criticism of the past in late Soviet film and literature, which was a result of the influx of previously censored texts and images. His interest in the use of the confessional mode of representation of violence in *The Kreutzer Sonata* might have been also triggered by the

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<sup>2</sup> Volodarskii, Eduard. 'I vot eto vremia prishlo...', *Sovetskii ekran*, No. 17, 1989, 7. (All translations from Russian texts are mine, unless specified otherwise. [A.S.])

<sup>3</sup> Arendt, Hanna. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Arendt, Hanna. 'Reporter at Large: Eichmann in Jerusalem – V,' *The New Yorker*, 16, March 1963, 58–134.

widespread valorisation of violence in the late Soviet period. It was associated with the revival of sentimentality characterised by the exploitative use of cheap emotions in order to overemphasise evil, especially in relation to the re-examination of the Soviet past. It would be useful to invoke here Phyllis McGinley's 1961 essay 'The Sentimentalists' which says that 'to overstress evil is as banal as to overemphasise goodness'. Although McGinley's observation refers to a group of American writers who substituted the nineteenth-century sentimentality of virtue 'with the sentimentality of wickedness, weakness, self-pity',<sup>5</sup> it can be applied to late-Soviet writers and filmmakers whose attacks on communist ideology were often highly emotional and self-indulgent. Shveitser's film suggests that Tolstoy's representation of the corrosive effects of habitual attitudes to violence in Russia as demonstrated in *The Kreutzer Sonata* points to the manipulative use of confessional discourse and sentimentality in the construction of public perceptions of history, national identity and individualism.

It is worth noting here that Shveitser's use of literary adaptations prior to 1987 was indicative of his desire to switch the audience's attention from the Socialist Realist modes of expression to the notions of creativity offered by Russian nineteenth-century authors whose works were often reduced by Soviet educationalists and censors to the status of instruments of propaganda. In a 1999 interview Shveitser presents himself as a follower of Georgy Kozintsev, Lev Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol and Fedor Dostoevsky. Shveitser's interview sheds new light on the hero of the film, Pozdnyshev. It moulds Tolstoy's protagonist into an enlightened figure who had experienced a spiritual transformation after several years of imprisonment for murdering his wife. According to Shveitser, Pozdnyshev grew to understand that he was the product of a conformist society which taught him to treat women as objects of desire and think on-

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<sup>5</sup> McGinley, Phyllis, 'The Sentimentalists,' *Ladies Home Journal*, volume 23, July 1961, 102-103, see p. 102.

ly about personal satisfaction, responding thereby only to physiological needs. Shveitser explains Pozdnyshev's monological mindset as one of the main factors responsible for his murder. 'He murdered his wife,' says Shveitser, 'because he judged her and the musician in accordance with his own world view.'<sup>6</sup> Following Tolstoy, Shveitser defines this extreme version of subjectivity as madness that derives from the egocentric outlook based on the desire to consume everything and satisfy personal ego. He regards this phenomenon as caused by the degradation of Christian values, the suppression of a holistic approach to human behavior, and a lack of spirituality. Shveitser's 1999 interview also poses a question about the ethical responsibility of artists, and affirms that they should be opposed to attempts by mass culture and television to manipulate public opinion. Shveitser presents himself as an avid opponent of the market economy and extreme subjectivity, anxious about the fragmentation of social and private selves triggered by the reforms of the 1980s. At the same time, he advocates the reinstatement of moral values and spirituality as a counter-vision to the prevailing sense of nihilism, cynicism and disillusionment.

In his 1999 interview Shveitser also explains that his film *The Kreutzer Sonata* includes a polemical approach to Tolstoy's philosophy of erotic celibacy. As Shveitser asserts, his film was meant to dismiss Tolstoy's ideal as unattainable. In order to draw the attention of viewers to the polemical engagement with Tolstoy's text, Shveitser inserted at the beginning of the film an episode (absent in Tolstoy's text) featuring several travellers drinking tea and discussing the publication of Tolstoy's latest book – *The Kreutzer Sonata* – which they see as a manifestation of madness. One of the travellers (played by Alla Demidova) expresses her opinion on Tolstoy's enthusiasm about erotic celibacy thus: 'It's a pity that our Russian writers go mad so quickly'.

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<sup>6</sup> Shveitser, Mikhail. 'A seichas drugoe vremecho...', *Figury i litsa, Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26.11.1999, accessed on May 9, 2010, [http://faces.ng.ru/figures/1999-11-26/5\\_othertime.html](http://faces.ng.ru/figures/1999-11-26/5_othertime.html)

She claims that she has two daughters and such a recipe for social engineering would be harmful to them. Another participant in the conversation suggests that such a utopian ideal could lead to the disappearance of humankind altogether.

The above discussion of Tolstoy inserted into the film enables the audience to view his novella in the context of the Russian erotic utopia advocated by the decadent utopians. It aspired to overcome the pan-European crisis of sexuality and create new forms of love and life practices that would enable individuals to transform the body and the family. According to Olga Matich, 'the key difference between the Russian erotic utopia and Freud's theory [...] is its grounding in a profoundly religious as well as utopian vision of life instead of individual psychology'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Matich identifies Tolstoy in his later years as an adherent of 'the specifically Russian challenge to individualism, procreation, and genealogy' and attests that 'even though the Bolshevik revolution was firmly grounded in a social philosophy of history, its subtext was also related to utopian thinking and a concern with Russian history'.<sup>8</sup> She sees Tolstoy as a transitional figure between Russian realism and early Russian modernism characterised by the influence of Vladimir Solovyov and Russian Symbolism. She distinguishes, however, between Tolstoy's vision of erotic celibacy shaped by the moral tradition of Christian asceticism and Solovyov's notion of transfigurative celibacy entwined with a utopian teleology. The latter presupposes the existence of different stages of cultural developments such as growth, stagnation and death, advocating thereby an organicist model of history.<sup>9</sup> In representing the body, Tolstoy, argues

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<sup>7</sup> Matich, Olga, *Erotic Utopia: The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Din de Siècle*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> In Russia such a view of culture was developed by Danilevskii: Danilevskii, N. Ia, *Rossia i Evropa: Vzglad na kul'turnye i politicheskie otnosheniia Slavianskogo mira k Germano-Romanskomu*, St Petersburg: Tipografiia brat'ev Panteleevykh, 1895.

Matich, has some similarities with psychopathologists of the 1880s who were especially interested in obsessive repetition and fetishism. She goes on to say: ‘Of particular interest in this respect is his choice of words to express the power of art, which he described using medical discourse. I have in mind his well-known essay *What is Art?* [...], in which he affiliated its power with infection [...] and contagion.’<sup>10</sup> Matich attests that Tolstoy’s evolution from the writer who celebrated family and procreation to the author who developed a fear of the degeneration of society and the body can be explained by the influence of contemporary scientific theory. Viewed in this light, Pozdnyshev’s confession might be seen ‘as a psychopathological case history from *Psychopathia Sexualis*’.<sup>11</sup> Matich’s observation that Pozdnyshev describes Trukhachevsky as a feminised male who has protruding buttocks like a woman and talks about several degenerative aspects of Russian men’s behaviour implies that Pozdnyshev presents himself to his fellow travellers as ‘the contemporary psychopathologist who tries to be scientific.’<sup>12</sup> She also finds it difficult to believe that Tolstoy, ‘a firm believer in individual moral responsibility, put all the blame on society, even though Pozdnyshev seems to attribute his condition to the depraved state of contemporary family relations.’<sup>13</sup> Such a conceptual framework provides a clue for Shveitser’s selection of *The Kreutzer Sonata* for adaptation during the period of Kinoglasnost’. Indeed, the film brings to the fore the question about the radical forms of utopian thinking that lead to the decadent displacement of the whole by a fetish object as a tool for controlling body and society. Such a radical form of utopian thinking also en-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

asures criminalisation of those forms of behaviour and artistic expression that deviate from the established norms and therefore might be deemed as degenerate. Furthermore, by presenting Pozdnyshev's behaviour as totalitarian, Shveitser identifies the roots of Pozdnyshev's criminal mindset in the suppression of critical thinking and pluralism with the help of scientific discourse and positivist approaches to creativity to which he was exposed. In an allegorical way, the film alludes to the obsessive applications of Marxist dogma in real life with the help of scientific discourse during the Soviet period.

It is clear from the invention of the introductory part by the directors that their emphasis on the metatextual quality of the film enables them to promote an open discussion about the inter-relationship between art and life. Their film might be defined as a commentary that re-emphasises the original.<sup>14</sup> Shveitser's adaptation of Tolstoy's novella can be best described in terms suggested by Linda Hutcheon: 'What we might, by analogy, call the adaptive faculty is the ability to repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity, to be at once both self and Other.'<sup>15</sup> Hutcheon's theory of adaptation implies that adaptations might be approached in the same way as biological organisms, enabling the readers to observe 'how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places.'<sup>16</sup> In this respect, it seems that Shveitser's adaptation of Tolstoy's novella differs from the original inasmuch as it does not display the same anxiety towards music as does the narrator of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*. On the contrary, it welcomes the shift articulated in Beethoven's music from the romantic image of the interpreter towards music that can be re-constructed and experienced anew.

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<sup>14</sup> Wagner, Geoffrey, *The Novel and the Cinema*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, New York; London: Routledge, 2006, p.174.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.176.



According to Barthes, Beethoven's music is placed in the revolutionary category in the context of nineteenth-century aesthetics that might be defined as the tangible intelligibility. Barthes points out that the operation by which one can grasp Beethoven's late music is not related to performance or hearing, but to the ability to read its score: 'Just as the reading of the modern text [...] consists not in receiving, in knowing or in feeling the text, but in writing it anew, in crossing its writing with a fresh inscription, so too reading this Beethoven is *to operate* his music, to draw it (it is willing to be drawn) into an unknown *praxis*.'<sup>17</sup> In other words, Barthes thinks that Beethoven's late music contains a utopian goal to teach the audience to approach any performance as master class or workshop. By the same token, Shveitser's film explores the metatextual quality of Tolstoy's novella in order to teach the new audience to appreciate the classical authors and composers through the lens of adapters who approach the stories of the past as eternal cognitive models. Such an approach to adaptation enables the audience to see the world afresh and enrich its understanding of human actions in new socio-political contexts. Robert Stam explains the inter-relationship between original text and film in these terms: 'The source text forms a dense informational network, a series of verbal cues which the adapting film text can then selectively take up, amplify, ignore, subvert or transform.'<sup>18</sup> Indeed, intertextuality is an important part of film adaptation. Not only does it enhance the meaning of adaptation with an additional dimension, it also enables us to talk about film adaptation in terms of layering, acknowledging thereby the effect of simultaneity on

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<sup>17</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Image. Music. Text.*, [Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath], London: Fontana Press, 1977, p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> Stam, Robert, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation*, London, Anthalone Press, 2000, pp. 54-78, see p. 66.

the construction of meaning. As Stam puts it, 'film adaptations can be seen as a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts.'<sup>19</sup>

In order to see the process of the interaction of intertexts in film adaptation, it is worth examining the importance of the preservation of the confessional mode of narration in Shveitser's film. In Tolstoy's narrative about the violent death of an innocent individual, Vasily Pozdnyshev, the protagonist of the story, murders his wife out of jealousy, but he talks about his crime in a sentimental and self-pitying way to his fellow travellers in the train while he is returning home from prison. Pozdnyshev presents himself as a victim of Russian education and societal conventions which did not provide him with a good set of moral and spiritual guidelines. Clearly, Shveitser thought that it would be helpful to assist attempts by late Soviet subjects to comprehend Stalinism and its legacy by means of Tolstoy's story which voiced a critique of the Russian legal system and imperial ideology. More importantly, Shveitser might have been as suspicious as Tolstoy of the role of confessional modes of expression in the manipulation of the truth and in the process of forgetting the uncomfortable past. J. M. Coetzee's observation that confession is only one element in a sequence that also includes transgression, penitence and absolution suggests that it results in 'the closing of the chapter' and 'the oppression of the memory'.<sup>20</sup> Such a view provides us with a good understanding of Shveitser's anxiety about the fact that the truth about one's self revealed through confession might lead to transgression and to the suppression of some aspects of a guilty conscience that resist representation. To put it differently, if Shveitser's film alludes to contemporary debates about the Soviet past, then it could be interpreted as an embodiment of the director's concerns about the ethics of repre-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Coetzee, J. M., 'Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky,' *Comparative Literature*, 37/3, 1985, 193-232, see p. 194.

sentation and the existence of the right legal and moral structures for dealing with numerous stories about victims and perpetrators of violence in Stalin's Russia in a sensitive and responsible manner.

It is useful to start our analysis with Tolstoy's 'confessional fiction'<sup>21</sup> itself in order to see which aspects of the story became accentuated in Shveitser's film and to examine the contextual setting of Shveitser's concerns about crime and punishment in the 1980s. It is worth noting here that Pozdnyshev's story is not welcomed by his fellow passengers, who shift away from him, leaving him alone with an unnamed narrator. Pozdnyshev's story retold through the narrator – who listens in full to the whole history of Pozdnyshev's crime – constitutes the main body of Tolstoy's text. Such a perspective on Pozdnyshev's crime raises a question about the subjectivity and reliability of the story that remains unverified by others. We are not sure whether Pozdnyshev's account of his moment of illumination in prison was correctly reported by the narrator or whether it was mediated by the narrator in a fictionalised manner. As has been noted above, Shveitser was unconcerned with the notion of the reliability of the story. His focus is on the moment of illumination in Pozdnyshev's life which might be seen as a first sign of spiritual awakening. Certainly, the use of exclamation marks and the repetition in Pozdnyshev's statements that his eyes had become opened and 'everything has been reversed, everything has been reversed' since then make his confession sound more authentic and emotionally charged.<sup>22</sup> Coetzee reminds us that the use of confession in Tolstoy's novella is twofold: 'The confession on which he embarks in the train has [...] two sides: the facts of the 'episode', which have already, of course, come out in court, and the truth about himself to which his eyes have since been

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>22</sup> *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories by Leo Tolstoy*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude and J.D. Duff, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 85-177, see p. 96.

opened. Telling the latter truth, in turn, is closely allied to denouncing error, a state of error in which, in his opinion, the entire class from which he comes still lives.<sup>23</sup>

By reducing the role of the narrator in his film and by using the close-up, Shveitser turned Pozdnyshev into a confessor who simultaneously speaks to a scarcely visible person and to the audience of Shveitser's film. As a result of this switch of attention to Pozdnyshev himself, the film uses a shock effect and confronts the audience with the overpowering reality depicted in the film. Was it then Shveitser's intention to make his audience realise that any seemingly rationalised explanations of the radical evil found in late Soviet literature and media cannot offer any satisfactory solutions to the crimes against humanity committed during Stalinism? An implied critique of the mass violence and totalitarian murderers embedded in Shveitser's film accords well with Vida Johnson's description of the widespread interest in the dark sides of Russian history and psyche found in the films inspired by Gorbachev's policy of glasnost. She writes: ' [...] glasnost films of the late 1980s and early 1990s tended to focus either on rediscovering the 'real' Soviet history, especially the Stalinist period, or offered hard-hitting, often overdone, exposés of the social, economic and moral collapse of the present-day Soviet Union (these were pejoratively known as *chernukha*, *pornukha*, *bytovukha* films). But the novelty and shock value of such films wore off rather quickly, in that real life events — the August putsch, the collapse of the Soviet Union, mafia killings — which were all reported in living colour on TV screens, outdid anything the filmmakers could dream up.'<sup>24</sup> Her statement suggests that the obsession with violence in films made in the late 1980s and early 1990s might have been caused

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<sup>23</sup> Coetzee, 'Confession and Double Thoughts', 195.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Vida T., 'The Search for a New Russia in an "Era of New Films"', *Russian Review*, 56/2, 1997, 281-85, see p. 282.

both by the commercial interests of some filmmakers and by the many sensationalist aspects of re-examining the past.

The first three years of the economic restructuring of Soviet cultural institutions under Gorbachev distracted the best talent from aesthetic pursuits. Many critics felt that no masterpieces were produced during the Perestroika period, and for this reason the Eighth Plenum of the Filmmakers Union in May 1989 was dedicated to the renewal of artistic awareness. It led to the rehabilitation of many films prohibited in the 1960s-1980s. The influx of censored films from the 1960s-1970s triggered a public debate about the conformity of the Soviet intelligentsia and about the effects of this conformism on Soviet writers and filmmakers. The main concern of the participants of this meeting — including invited speakers from abroad such as Andrey Siniavsky and David Puttnam — was the artistic quality of late Soviet films. Anna Lawton notes: ‘Two causes were pinpointed: conformism of thought, due to long years of ideological brainwashing, and commercialization, or the gold rush triggered by the free market economy.’<sup>25</sup> Arguably, Shveitser and Milkina’s film engages with these concerns. That is why the emphasis on Pozdnyshev, presented as a conformist in Shveitser’s film, would have been understood by the audience as an allusion to the public debate about the legacy of the Soviet totalitarian regime and its ideology.

The above-mentioned political overtones are especially strongly pronounced in its final part where the concluding words of Pozdnyshev’s confession ‘Forgive me’ are addressed not only to his travelling companion, but also to the audience. The close-up used in this scene features Pozdnyshev’s face surrounded by darkness, and it creates an icon-like effect that forces the viewers to accept the new enlightened self of Tolstoy’s protagonist. At this particular point the style of acting that presents Pozdnyshev as a psychopathologist and the muffled voice of Oleg Iankovsky (who

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<sup>25</sup> Lawton, Anna, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 91.

plays Pozdnyshev), together with the use of monochrome colouration, invokes the image of Hamlet played by Innokenty Smoktunovsky in Grigory Kozintsev's 1964 film *Hamlet*, establishing thereby some thematic analogies between the two films.

Kozintsev's film develops many ideas conveyed in Nikolai Akimov's 1932 stage adaptation of *Hamlet*: the sense of continuity was also reinforced by Dmitry Shostakovich's colourful music which was used in both adaptations of Shakespeare's play. The premiere of Akimov's production of *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow took place on 19 May 1932 where, as Alma Law puts it, 'Akimov's basic thesis was that Hamlet is a fighter and a political intriguer rather than a philosopher. In this sense he more closely resembles his forerunner, Saxo's clever Amlethus, who pretends madness to protect himself until the time is ripe to avenge the murder of his father.'<sup>26</sup> Yet Shveitser's production portrays Pozdnyshev as a pseudo-Hamlet who just wants to present himself to his fellow travellers as an enlightened person. In reality, if Pozdnyshev presents himself as a victim of the society to which he belonged, then it means that he lacked the courage to fight social ills and injustice. Furthermore, Shveitser's film implies that Pozdnyshev was a 'totalitarian' murderer because he was anxious to control his wife and protect her from the liberating effects of Beethoven's sonata. By using a close-up and a loud musical performance contrasting with Pozdnyshev's muffled voice in the train, the director encourages his audience to appreciate a truly dialogical and improvisational mode of artistic expression represented in the film by Pozdnyshev's wife and her co-performer Trukhachevsky. They both enjoy playing Beethoven's music, and their performance – presented in the film in a powerful manner – reinforces the dialogical principle of true art. Shveitser also highlights how Pozdnyshev is threatened by the effects of Beethoven's sonata on people

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<sup>26</sup> Law, Alma H., "'Hamlet' at the Vakhtangov,' *The Drama Review*, 21/4, *Playwrights and Playwriting Issue*, 1977, 100-110, see p. 101.

by depicting him as an obsessive individual. Pozdnyshev's words 'Ugh! It's a terrifying thing, that sonata'<sup>27</sup> are translated into a cinematic spectacle that both enchants and terrifies the audience.

Bearing in mind that Pozdnyshev is portrayed in the film as an obsessive 'totalitarian' thinker, the main accusation raised in the film lies in the sphere of personal responsibility. Not only does Pozdnyshev suppress any creative and improvisational modes of artistic expression in himself, but he also suppresses his own ability to think critically and wants others to be obedient and passive. He acts like a pseudo-Hamlet because he uses confession upon his return from prison to present himself in a self-pitying manner. At the same time, his desire to analyse everything and to talk about his life in an open manner reminds the audience of how any form of introspective mode of thinking and writing were suppressed by the Soviet authorities. Commenting on the suppression of reflexivity associated with Hamlet-like behavior during Stalin's era, Nikolai Chushkin writes: 'In contrast with the heroes of other great Shakespearean tragedies, Hamlet, it was said, with his tragic doubts and indecisiveness, his inability to see concrete ways of eradicating evil, was distant from contemporary Soviet audiences who were filled with active courage, optimism, and a sense of clear purpose in life and that looked to Shakespeare for 'a real hero', not 'Hamletism', for them synonymous with vacillation and passive reflection [...]. In the following years, the very idea of showing on the stage a thoughtful, reflective hero who took nothing on faith, who scrutinised intently the life around him in an effort to discover for himself, without outside 'prompting' the reasons for its defects, separating truth from falsehood, the very idea seemed almost 'criminal'.'<sup>28</sup> That is why in the post-Stalin period Soviet theatres were seized by the Hamlet fever, since many theatrical and film directors felt

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<sup>27</sup> *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, (trans. L. Maude et. al.), p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Chushkin, N. N., *Gamlet-Kachalov*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966, p. 309.

that Stalin liquidated Hamlet leaving no place in a closed society for a person who scrutinised and vacillated. 'Beginning with a Leningrad performance of Hamlet in April 1954, under Kozintsev's direction,' Arthur Mendel attests, 'Hamlet became a 'brother-in-arms' [...] in the arduous and tortuous efforts of Soviet society to liquidate Stalinism.'<sup>29</sup> It seems that by exposing Tolstoy's protagonist as a pseudo-Hamlet, Shveitser and Milkina continued the tradition of the Thaw period when Soviet intellectuals equated Hamlet with the strikingly pensive mood of society in a country intensely engrossed in a struggle against the legacy of Stalinism.

The gesture of Shveitser and Milkina to link Pozdnyshev to the representation of Hamlet in Soviet film and theatre stems from the belief that the Thaw period was an unfinished project in the liberalisation of Soviet society that could be successfully developed during Perestroika. In his extensive survey of Soviet criticism of Hamlet, Miller pinpoints this: 'What is rotten in Elsinore, in the opinion of Soviet critics, is the deep and pervasive moral corruption of its people, and the cause of this corruption they find not in class relations, in feudal or capitalist exploitation, or in the nature of private property, but in the tyranny of its criminal ruler.'<sup>30</sup> Departing from the Thaw period's focus on Stalin and his associates, Shveitser's film implies that totalitarian tendencies turned ordinary Soviet people into conformists. The film also alludes to the many Soviet filmmakers who felt during the period of Gorbachev's glasnost that they were coerced by Soviet authorities into reproducing images of revolutionary violence and propaganda. As with Pozdnyshev, many representatives of the Soviet intelligentsia felt they were deprived of an opportunity to be more independent.

The use in Shveitser's film of cinematic images based on the contrast between darkness and light, as well as between loud and muffled sound effects, suggests that

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<sup>29</sup> Mendel, Arthur P., 'Hamlet and Soviet Humanism,' *Slavic Review*, 30/4, 1971, 733-747, see p. 734.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



Shveitser's visual and aural allusions to Kozintsev's film were intentional. After all, Kozintsev's depiction of Elsinore in *Hamlet* was meant to invoke the atmosphere of political oppression and fear that hung over everyday life in the Soviet Union even after the death of Stalin. In his collection of articles *Our Contemporary William Shakespeare*, Kozintsev reveals the widespread obsession with the evil power of the state in terms conspicuously similar to the description of Stalin's era in Soviet unofficial literature. His statement that 'fear – a general, mutual guarantee – is the very air of Elsinore'<sup>31</sup> is applicable to Shveitser's portrayal of Pozdnyshev's totalitarian behaviour towards his wife. Shveitser's Pozdnyshev instils fear in the members of his own family even prior to the act of murdering his wife, especially because of his fascination with knives and weapons. According to the logic of the film, Pozdnyshev's belief in abstract principles and his perverted ill will detach him both from his family and from humanity. Throughout the film, exaggeratedly and repetitively, Pozdnyshev refers to the widespread conformism and the evil power of the state that infects its subjects, thereby presenting himself as a victim and a puppet of the existing order based on violence. Yet he never questions his own 'totalitarian' solutions to the problem of superfluous music exemplified by Beethoven's works that do not match his utilitarian vision of art as a tool of control and manipulation.

The above observations help explain why some critics found the ending of the Shveitser's film so obscure. Arguably, its symbolic visual language and intertextual references to Kozintsev's *Hamlet* add further depth to its meaning. The film was meant to be better understood by the viewers versed in Shveitser's Aesopian language and visual allusions to famous Russian films that treat similar themes. The allegorical meaning of the concluding scenes can be interpreted in conjunction with the final sce-

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<sup>31</sup> Kozintsev, Grigorii, *Nash sovremennik: Vil'iam Shekspir*, Leningrad-Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966, p. 320.

ne of the film bearing the phrase 'It was early spring.'<sup>32</sup> The phrase is taken from the first paragraph of Tolstoy's novella, but its placement in the concluding scene of the film enables the director to position the film with an open-ended framing. The inscription referring to early spring would have been taken by many viewers as an allusion to both the cultural thaw of the 1960s and the liberal policies of the Perestroika period. Without the analysis of intertextual links between Shveitser's film and Soviet cinema of the early period, it would be difficult to understand how Shveitser inscribes himself as an interpreter of Tolstoy in a new political context into the tradition of polyphonic representation of truth.

The aforementioned intertextual link between Soviet liberal cinema (exemplified by Kozintsev's *Hamlet*) and Shveitser's film escaped some critics altogether. Being a non-Russian viewer, Philip Strick notes that the request for forgiveness inserted into the concluding scenes of the film is puzzling. He states: 'The Russian word for 'farewell' [...] also intriguingly embodies a request for forgiveness — but for what? For committing murder? For proving an implausible advocate? For outstaying his welcome? And this apparently irrelevant afterthought, transposed from the opening of the novel, conveys curious undertones both of hope, against all odds, and of a historical event that is now rendered harmless.'<sup>33</sup> Although Strick's interpretation is misguided since the film does not use the imperfective imperative plural form of the Russian word 'to forgive' (*npouqaïme*) which can be used to mean 'farewell', but restricts its usage to the perfective imperative forms (both singular and plural, *npocmu/npocmume*), i.e. 'forgive', he rightly detects the presence of optimistic overtones in Shveitser's film. In some ways, it might be seen as a reinforcement of Tol-

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<sup>32</sup> *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, (trans. L. Maude et. al.), p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> Strick, Philip, 'Kreitzerova Sonata (*The Kreutzer Sonata*)', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 56/660, January 1989, 17-18, see p. 18.

stoy's belief in the importance of Truth and the transformative power of art, especially because of the association between early spring and the Easter celebrations explored in Russian literature in terms of new beginnings and spiritual awakening.

Furthermore, the use of the still in the concluding scene of the film destroys the boundary between the cinematic space and reality. As Roland Barthes puts it, 'the still throws off the constraint of filmic time [...], scorns logical time' and 'teaches us how to dissociate the technical constraint from what is the specific filmic and what is 'indescribable' meaning.'<sup>34</sup> The framing of the last episode in a way that imitates the use of stills in silent movies creates a sense of the simultaneous existence of two different temporal dimensions. It draws the attention of viewers to the concluding part of the film. It is imbued with symbolic meaning that links the revival of the thaw period's cultural policies with the rebirth of spirituality in the late Soviet period. Viewed as a parable, Shveitser's film implies that the reinforcement of a new social order based on the notion of spiritual rebirth and dialogicity would be impossible without an acknowledgement of the shared sense of collective responsibility for sustaining the totalitarian regime for so long. In this respect, the philosophical tenets of Shveitser's film echo Kozintsev's concerns with the moral disintegration of Soviet society as expressed in his adaptation of *Hamlet*. As Kozintsev points out, 'Research into the poetic images show that concepts of sickness-unto-death and decomposition dominate in *Hamlet* [...]. What is noble and spiritual has disappeared from life. What is dreadful is not the beastly crimes but the day-to-day relationships that lack humanity. Decorative words form merely an appearance of humanity and nobility. And these are lies...

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<sup>34</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Image. Music. Text*, [Essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath], London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 67-8.

Hamlet wants to make people stop lying.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, Shveitser wants Soviet citizens of the late 1980s to stop lying.

One of the most significant messages conveyed in Shveitser's film is related to the importance of education in the formation of morally developed individuals. The flashbacks featuring Pozdnyshev's youth in *The Kreutzer Sonata* characterise him as a product of high-placed judgements and established conventions. The use of the lively cabaret-style music that accompany Pozdnyshev's memories of sexual encounters and moral corruption stand in sharp contrast to the music associated with moments of spiritual awakening. It is not coincidental that the most striking flashbacks, occurring towards the end of the film, merge into a single event of Pozdnyshev's wedding and his wife's funeral. The golden images of the Russian Orthodox cathedral and the sunny landscape featured in these flashbacks convey the belief in the indestructibility of soul and spirit.

Furthermore, the episodes depicting Pozdnyshev's wife as a saint-like figure (associated with the light and sunny landscapes) contrast strikingly with the dark train compartment in which Pozdnyshev tells his story to a random travel companion and to the dark aspects of his mind responsible for his impulsive and irrational behaviour. The liturgical music in the final episodes invoke the funeral procession related to Ophelia's death depicted in Kozintsev's film in a similar way that associates her with holiness and nature. Both funeral processions interweave into their music the chimes of church bells that allude to the Kontakion, an ancient Russian Orthodox hymn used *inter alia* as part of the Russian Orthodox requiem service. With Shostakovich's melodic signature DSCH deriving from the two main phrases in the Kontakion melody,<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kozintsev, *Nash sovremennik*, pp. 173 & 175.

<sup>36</sup> Strachan, Iain, 'Shostakovich, Britten, Beethoven, and the 'Russian Kontakion for the Departed', *DSCH Journal*, 11, 1999, 54-61.

Gubaidulina's use of this melody enables the directors of the film to remind the audience of Russian liturgical music so as to reinforce the message that everyone deserves commemoration after death. In Tolstoyan manner, the film reminds the audience that the glory of the Russian and Soviet empires depends upon the sacrifice of many ordinary Russians seldom recognised as heroes. Thus the semi-veiled reference to the Kontakion and to Shostakovich's music is meant to remind the audience that even if a saint or martyr is not officially canonised by the Eastern Orthodox Church, a memorial service may be celebrated at any time.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, the film dismisses the philosophy of totalising truth as harmful and destructive, suggesting thereby the importance of cultivating the notion of empathy and tolerance. If we were to interpret the theme of suffering and empathy as an extension of the Hamlet theme popular in the cinema and literature in the post-Stalin period, then Kozintsev's understanding of Shakespeare's work as a tragedy of consciousness appears applicable to Shveitser's version of Tolstoy's story: it explores the ability of criminals to feel guilt. In summary, Kozintsev explains the essence of Shakespeare's tragedy as follows: 'It was possible to swim with the current, to live without thinking, and even quite comfortably. To accept as necessary what existed in fact, without thinking about it, without searching into the essence of things that were beyond the power of one individual to alter, to be concerned only about oneself or, at best, those nearest one. [...] And if the conscience of a man did not grow deaf and dumb, then he, with all the strength that was in him, cursed man's inhumanity. And he cursed himself if he could not fight it.'<sup>38</sup> In Pozdnyshev's case, however, the act of cursing inhumanity stems from the murder of his wife and his subsequent imprisonment. Symbolically,

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<sup>37</sup> Serfes, Father Demetrious, 'Tropar and Kontakion for Royal Martyrs and New Martyrs of Russia', accessed on July 5, 2011, <http://www.serfes.org/royal/tropar.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Kozintsev, *Nash sovremennik*, p. 208.

the flashback of saint-like images of Pozdnyshev's wife presents her as an Ophelia-like figure.

The music of Sofia Gubaidulina used in *The Kreutzer Sonata* resembles Kozintsev's creative appropriation of Shostakovich's music in *Hamlet* in which the image of Ophelia signifies Truth.<sup>39</sup> As with Shostakovich, Gubaidulina, a leading Russian neo-avant-garde composer, wanted to break the mould of the Socialist realist aesthetic and to revive the notion of spirituality and polyphony. In the words of Vera Lukomsky, Gubaidulina is 'recognised as one of the most original and powerful composers of our time [...] opposed the totalitarianism of Soviet ideology.'<sup>40</sup> Lukomsky aptly sums up the most striking philosophical and moral tenets of Gubaidulina's music thus: 'Her predilection for mysticism and metaphysics, her religious spirituality and musical fantasy that often projects images of the Apocalypse and the last Judgment, her preoccupation with musical symbols of crucifixion, resurrection and transfiguration, did not, of course, meet the requirements of Socialist Realism.'<sup>41</sup> Gubaidulina emerged in the 1980s as a composer of great significance; prior to this, in the 1960s and 1970s, she was known as a co-founder of the group 'Asteria' that performed experimental music using western and oriental traditions and instruments, as well as electronic music. Most importantly, Gubaidulina is often seen as a composer with a deep-rooted belief in the mystical properties of music. In an interview she comments on the pre-Perestroika oppressive cultural climate in a critical way: 'As I grew older, music became the single sustenance by which I was able to live and exist

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<sup>39</sup> According to Kozintsev's observation, based on his long-standing friendship and cooperation with Shostakovich, Shostakovich's voice of Truth is feminine. See: Kozintsev, Grigorii, *King Lear: The Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director*, translated by Mary Mackintosh, London: Heinemann, 1977, p. 247.

<sup>40</sup> Gubaidulina, Sofia, 'My Desire is Always to Rebel, to Swim Against the Stream!', Interview Conducted and Translated from the Russian by Vera Lukomsky, *Perspectives of New Music*, 1998, 36/1, 1998, 5-36, see p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

[...]. All my life was grey, and I only felt good when I crossed the gate of the music school. From this moment I would find myself in a sacred space. I would hear the sounds coming out of the classrooms, I would feel a bond with all of the pupils, and all would be joined together in this polytonal harmony of sounds, and in this world I wanted to live in.’<sup>42</sup> Gubaidulina sees herself as Russian Orthodox, but her religious and spiritual interests include the Catholic tradition, Judaism, shamanism, Islam, and Russian religious philosophers such as Vladimir Solovyov and Nikolay Berdyaev. In an interview Gubaidulina suggests that it became evident during the Perestroika period that there were many ‘living cells’ in the Soviet Union which resisted the disintegration of the spirit.<sup>43</sup>

In her 1989 interview, Gubaidulina goes on to say: ‘The unavailability of an interpretation and the opposition of the bureaucrats resulted in my devotion to composition of the highest philosophy since the world’s origin and, in doing so, I allowed myself the most complicated constructions.’<sup>44</sup> Gubaidulina’s music engages the audience in the same manner as Kozintsev’s films, believing that the public is keen to engage in active spiritual work through listening to music and the experience of profound contemplation. Gubaidulina is convinced that ‘the audience strives for active spiritual work’ and that people are grateful to performers who enable them ‘to cure themselves from the state of dispersal and disconnection that they suffer in everyday life.’ She continues: ‘Listening to a musical composition, like reading a book, helps people restore themselves.’<sup>45</sup> By using Gubaidulina’s music in their film, Shveitser and Milkina imply that Pozdnyshev’s and Tolstoy’s view of music as illusionist and

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Kholopova, Valentina, *Sofia Gubaidulina*, Moscow: Kompozitor, 1996, pp. 96-100.

<sup>43</sup> Gubaidulina, Sofia, ‘Est’ muzyka nad nami: beseda s Dmitriem Kadantsevym,’ *Ogonek*, No. 8, 1989, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Gubaidulina, Sofia, ‘Est’ muzyka nad nami’, 10.

seductive is reductionist. In their film, Gubaidulina is given her own voice that has a powerful effect on the audience. It celebrates unity and spirituality.

Unlike Gubaidulina, Shveitser's Pozdnyshev was intoxicated by music to the point of obsession and he sees it as a threat to people's unity. In Gustafson's opinion, Pozdnyshev 'loses clarity of consciousness' and becomes coerced into activity that estranges him from himself, so he overlooks how 'art returns men into their natural state of harmony.'<sup>46</sup> The latter statement corresponds to Gubaidulina's vision of the restorative role of music in the life of individuals traumatised by historical upheavals. Gubaidulina and Shveitser offer a counterpoint to Pozdnyshev's statements suggesting that music is a terrifying thing. Pozdnyshev confesses: 'Music makes me forget myself, my real position, one not my own. [...] Music transports me immediately and directly into that spiritual state in which the person was who composed it.'<sup>47</sup> According to Caryl Emerson, while Pozdnyshev is an admirer of Beethoven and infected by Beethoven's music, he is unable either to perform the sonata that affects his imagination or to create it anew. 'The result of infection,' says Emerson, 'was therefore not love, and not new creation [...] but creative frustration and murder.'<sup>48</sup> Tolstoy's own perception of Beethoven's sonata as an erotic piece of music is dismissed in Shveitser's film. As Emerson affirms, in his novella, 'Tolstoy confronts the contradictory elements of his own infection theory: its indifference to the dimension of time, its confusion of creation and performance, its insistence on a cloning of feelings in all

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<sup>46</sup> Gustafson, Richard F., *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 371.

<sup>47</sup> Tolstoy, Lev Nikolaevich, 'Kreitzerova sonata,' *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, volume 27 (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933): pp. 5-78. The quote from chapter 23 in English is taken from: Emerson, Caryl. 'What is Art? and The Anxiety of Music,' *Russian Literature*, XL, 1996, 433-450, see p. 441.

<sup>48</sup> Emerson, 'What is Art?', 441-442.



participants.’<sup>49</sup> Emerson thinks that Tolstoy’s novella contains a variation on the theme of envy (as manifested in Pushkin’s play ‘Mozart and Salieri’) rather than jealousy. She elucidates: ‘For what makes the Kreutzer Sonata so genuinely dangerous – and Pozdnyshev senses this truth, whereas Tolstoy the theorist of art resists it – is not its ability to fuse performers and listeners into a single, static loving whole but precisely its ability to differentiate, to complicate and enrich the world with multiple voices through time.’<sup>50</sup> Shveitser’s clearly expressed empathy for Pozdnyshev’s wife – reinforced by the use of Gubaidulina’s music and the use of religious symbols – implies that he is of the same opinion of Pozdnyshev as Emerson. The film’s denunciation of the monological and monumental tenets of artistic expression seems to be alluding to the Socialist Realist dogma and its watchdogs eager to attack zealously any manifestations of originality and diversity.

Given that Shveitser was a disciple of Eisenstein and Kozintsev and a victim of Stalin’s 1940s campaign against cosmopolitans, it is not surprising that Shveitser’s film, laced with political overtones, continues the tradition of his teachers of exposing the evils of society with the help of Aesopian language. Its allusions to the films of Kozintsev and Eisenstein<sup>51</sup> examining political oppression and violence lend them-

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 446-447.

<sup>51</sup> The scene of violence and madness in Shveitser’s film, including the graphic depiction of murder and Pozdnyshev’s collection of sabres and daggers, invoke, to a great extent, Eisenstein’s films *October* (1927) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1958), especially because of their melodramatic overtones and the music that resembles the operatic conventions of the modernist period. As Douglas Gallez asserts, Eisenstein’s representation of *Ivan the Terrible* is constructed in accordance with operatic conventions: ‘In *Ivan*, the songs and choruses follow these conventions, and the stylized performances of the principals, the melodrama and the *mise-en-scène* are within the operatic realm (particularly Wagnerian music and Bergian expressionism) rather than realistic.’ See: Gallez, Douglas W., ‘The Prokofiev-Eisenstein Collaboration: ‘Nevsky’ and ‘Ivan’ Revisited,’ *Cinema Journal*, 17/2, 1978, 13-35, see p. 28.

selves to be interpreted as a homage to his teachers. To some extent, Shveitser's film might be seen as a homage to Eisenstein who taught Shveitser to appreciate Tolstoy when in 1943-1944 he supervised Shveitser's film on Tolstoy. Shveitser describes his indebtedness to his teacher thus: 'We have learnt from Eisenstein how to be honest and how to read real literature.'<sup>52</sup> Shveitser continued to be interested in the aesthetic of sincerity exemplified by Tolstoy's writing throughout all his life. As an example, declaring that all his films were permeated with the invisible presence of Tolstoy, Shveitser pointed out that the protagonists of his film *Somebody Else's Family* (*Чужая родня*, 1956) reproduce the intensity of emotions displayed by Tolstoy's characters.<sup>53</sup> Viewed in this context, the film *The Kreutzer Sonata* might be interpreted as an allegorical denunciation of violence and conformity. In some ways, Pozdnyshev's madness (as depicted in the film) resembles the overwhelming state of madness and paranoia prevalent during the Stalin years. If the audience was expected to view the film as a parable about the long lasting effects of Stalin's terror on individuals, then Pozdnyshev's obsessive behavior might be seen as a mirror image of state violence. The depiction of Pozdnyshev's crime would invoke in a late 1980s audience the theme of madness associated with Stalinism and with the times of Ivan the Terrible. As Nikolai Cherkasov wrote in his autobiography, Stalin considered Ivan the Terrible to be 'a great and wise ruler who protected the country from the infiltration of foreign influence and had tried to bring about the unification of Russia.'<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting here that Eisenstein was coerced by the authorities in 1940 to produce a film

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Margolit, Evgenii, 'Umer Mikhail Shveitser', *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino, 1986–2000, Kino i kontekst, volume VII*, St Petersburg: Seans, 2004, accessed on June 5 2010, [http://www.russiancinema.ru/template.php?dept\\_id=3&e\\_dept\\_id=5&e\\_chdept\\_id=2&e\\_chr\\_id=841&chr\\_year=2000](http://www.russiancinema.ru/template.php?dept_id=3&e_dept_id=5&e_chdept_id=2&e_chr_id=841&chr_year=2000)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in: Thompson, Kristin, "Ivan the Terrible" and Stalinist Russia: A Reexamination,' *Cinema Journal*, 17/1, 1977, 30-43, see p. 33.

about Ivan the Terrible. It was expected that his film could convey to the audience the patriotic and nationalistic approach favoured by Stalin himself. As Kristin Thompson notes, ‘the connection between Ivan and Stalin would inevitably be drawn by many.’<sup>55</sup> Although Eisenstein’s film comprises the Orthodox Stalinist view of Ivan the Terrible as a cruel tyrant driven by a rational purpose, his film portrays an ambivalent image of Ivan the Terrible exploring the dialectical struggle between the irrational and rational aspects of his personality in a mythopoeic way. As Thompson observes, Eisenstein was more concerned with ‘creating an image of history’.<sup>56</sup>

Likewise, Shveitser’s use of Pozdnyshhev’s story might be seen as another mythopoeic and allegorical image of history. Shveitser’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* is full of images of trains and train journeys. It alludes to the first film shown in Russia: it was a Lumière film, *L’arrivée du train en gare*. Shown in May 1896 at the Aquarium Theatre in St Petersburg, it contained images of a train, violence and religious rituals including the Coronation of Tsar Nicholas II on 26 May [O.S. 14 May] 1896. Several shots depict the Imperial couple entering and leaving the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin. Jolyon Mitchell comments: ‘The religious rituals at the centre of the Coronation are not recorded nor are the numerous orthodox priests robed in gold or the golden icons that covered the walls of the cathedral. A camera did record, however, the moment a few days later when the Tsar was presented to the Russian people, only for a stand to collapse, leading to a stampede where hundreds were crushed to death. The film was confiscated and has never been seen since that time.’<sup>57</sup> The repetitive usage of the train imagery in *The Kreutzer Sonata* also brings to mind other im-

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, Jolyon, ‘Portraying Religion and Peace in Russian Film,’ *Studies in World Christianity*, 14/2, 2008, 142-152, see p. 143.

ages of trains as symbols of modernity. Many early Soviet films celebrated the new Soviet man and his machine-like ability to work hard. The list of famous films include Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera*, the Kozintsev and Trauberg 1934 movie *The Youth of Maxim*, and Aleksandr Zarkhi's 1967 film adaptation of Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. In contrast, Shveitser's film departs from the machine aesthetic of the Soviet avant-garde and accentuates the bond with nature rather than with technology. This is especially felt in the scenes containing the images of the train engine juxtaposed with Pozdnyshev's ritualistic and machine-like behaviour. This technique of baring the device (discussed in Viktor Shklovsky's seminal essay 'Art as Device') is prominently featured in Eisenstein's art defined by Roland Barthes as the artistic mode that defies ambiguity. Barthes writes: '[...] Eisenstein's 'art' is not polysemous: it chooses the meaning, imposes it, hammers it [...]: the Eisensteinian meaning devastates ambiguity, by the addition of an aesthetic value, emphasis. Eisenstein's 'decorativism' has an economic function: it proffers the truth.'<sup>58</sup> The examples of Eisenstein's decorativism used in Shveitser and Milkina's film include repeated use of the image of the train wheels and engine, especially in relation to the discussion of conformity and sexual desire presented in the film as a form of ritualistic behavior and positivist outlook shaped by the Soviet vision of modernity. Strick pinpoints the satirical intention of Shveitser and Milkina in using Offenbach's can-can theme on the soundtrack featuring the brothel sequence and of 'O sole mio' for scenes featuring Roman landmarks: he suggests that these satirical overtones contribute to the reductionist reading of Tolstoy's novella.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Barthes, Roland, 'The Third Meaning', *Image. Music. Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 52-68, see p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Strick, *Kreitzerova Sonata*, 17.

The lubok-like quality of the abovementioned scenes might be seen as part of the aggressive rendering of the original text with the help of intellectual montage. As Neya Zorkaya explains, *kinolubok* is meant to erase the author's individuality, level out different sources and transform them into the same story in such a way that the story of jealousy or murder becomes highlighted and singled out as the dominant theme.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, Shveitser's *The Kreutzer Sonata* contains a parodic rendering of the notion of 'kinolubok' as something incompatible with the language of Tolstoy's metatextual narrative that explores the role of the performer and the interpreter in the construction of meaning of works of art.

Even though Tolstoy's text is closely followed, the directors of the film have included several deviations that break the linear perception of time in the narrative. Strick indicates that some of the expansions are striking and visually engaging: 'There are, however, a number of interpolations, the most startling occurring as the school-boy is being led towards his first sexual encounter: a steam engine materialises in the corridor, rushes towards him and we are all engulfed in light, steam and noise until the initiation is complete. The plunging pistons reappear during the honeymoon, and their vulgar symbolism would be disastrously at odds with Tolstoy (whose case for celibacy was based on the belief that the act, far from being mechanical, is a deplorable expression of the unrestrainedly animal) were it not that the context of the entire narrative is a train journey, from which the directors have derived possibly more mileage than the novelist had in mind.'<sup>61</sup> Another recurrent association inserted into the film is the juxtaposition between Pozdnyshev and his collection of knives and sabres. They emphasize Pozdnyshev's inclination towards violent behaviour and prepare viewers

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<sup>60</sup> Zorkaia, Neia, 'Russkaia shkola ekranizatsii', *Ekrannye iskusstva i literature*, Moscow: Nauka, 1991, pp. 105-30.

<sup>61</sup> Strick, *Kreitzerova Sonata*, 17.

for the murder scene near the end of the film, creating the rhyme between love and murder found in Tsvetaeva's poem 1923 'Hamlet': Tsvetaeva's Hamlet is implicated in the death of Ophelia through the use of the rhyming words of the verbs 'I loved her' and 'I killed her'.<sup>62</sup>

The repetitive use of one particular detail which enables Shveitser and Milkina to build up the character or to reinforce their message about the corrosive effect of conformism on individuals might be seen as an attempt to reproduce several stylistic peculiarities of Tolstoy's writing that were defined by Vsevolod Pudovkin as power of persuasion. In his 1928 article 'How I work with Tolstoy' Pudovkin writes: 'He works with enormous persistence upon every detail. He denies himself any simple rules of elegant compositional style and doesn't shy away from using one and the same word repeatedly in a single passage in order to confer the greatest persuasive power. Tolstoy leaves the reader no room to see something other than as he shows it. Everything that he writes accords perfectly with the real object... The form of his language is so fundamental to the idea that any relativity is ultimately lost.'<sup>63</sup> The indebtedness of the directors to Pudovkin is also felt in the graphic examples of Pozdnyshev's impressionistic cognition of reality: through the use of flashbacks and the recurrent use of the train image that embodies his animal-like and conformist behaviour. These scenes invoke Pudovkin's 1926 film *The Mechanics of the Brain (The Behaviour of Man and*

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<sup>62</sup> Mikhail Shveitser appears to be well aware of this rhyme which was highlighted in Shostakovich's 1974 vocal cycle based on the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva: it features her poem 'Hamlet'. Victoria Shveitser, Mikhail Shveitser's sister and the author of one of the leading biographies of Tsvetaeva, has talked in her interview with Maiia Peshkova about her brother's love for poetry, suggesting that he knew many poems by heart. See: Peshkova, Maiia. 'Neproshedshee vremia', *Ekho Moskvy*, 20.07.2008, 08:35, accessed on June 7 2010, <http://www.echo-msk.ru/programs/time/528382-echo/>

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in: Sargeant, Amy, *Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000, p. 64.

*Animals*) in which Pudovkin shows several experiments with animals undertaken by Pavlov's followers (including Sechenov) and featuring mentally retarded and syphilitic patients. The repetitive use of can-can music and the image of the train's engine in *The Kreutzer Sonata* might be also seen as a parodic rendering of the ideological thrust of Pudovkin's *The Mechanics of the Brain* which features such scene titles as 'All life, all culture is wholly made up of reflexes' and 'The study of conditioned reflexes serves as the basis of materialist understanding of the behaviour of animals and man.' By contrast with Pudovkin and Eisenstein, Shveitser and Milkina offer an alternative to Pavlov's belief in the power of science and the future potential of physiology to address the world's ills.

As indicated above, the use of radiant and dream-like images of the Russian Orthodox Church, especially in one of the final episodes that features the funeral of Pozdnyshev's wife, creates a sense of the mystery and richness of life. The final scene featuring the dead body of Pozdnyshev's wife also contains a flashback to remind viewers of Pozdnyshev's wedding and the church ceremony associated with it, signifying wholeness and spiritual union between man and woman. Despite Shveitser and Milkina sharing with Pudovkin the imperative for clarity and the careful organisation of camera work in time and space, their use of light in the film and the dream-like quality of flashbacks representing the inner thoughts of Pozdnyshev testify to their belief that the camera should also be used to explore metaphysical truths. In many ways, their film exposes the limitations of the use by Pudovkin and Eisenstein of intellectual montage as an effective tool in the conscious guidance of the spectator. The film offers a critique of the assumption that the conditional reflex should be seen as the foundation of behaviour in man. Thus Pudovkin's 1925 statement that Soviet cinema should propagate Pavlov's teaching, corroborated by the materialist world view

that the notion of soul had to be extinguished,<sup>64</sup> appears replaced in Shveitser's film by the revival of spirituality. This is achieved by the close collaboration between Shveitser, Milkina and Gubaidulina who were all opposed to the use of culture for propaganda purposes. Gubaidulina's vision of the transformative and corrective role of religious discourse in cultural activities appears representative of many non-conformist artists, composers, writers and film-makers, including Andrey Tarkovsky, Gennady Aigi, and Olga Sedakova. Gubaidulina explains: 'I'm a religious orthodox person and I understand religion literally: namely as religion — the restoration of a connection, the restoration of the Legato of Life. Life tears a person to pieces. One must repair one's wholeness — that is what religion is all about. There is no more serious reason for the composition of music than spiritual restoration.'<sup>65</sup> In the light of this contextual setting, it becomes clear why Shveitser and Milkina would have chosen Tolstoy's novella about music for their philosophical parable. As with Gubaidulina's music, their film aspires to restore the human connection through music and visual images which celebrate improvisation, diversity and richness of life.

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<sup>64</sup> Pudovkin, Vsevolod, *Kinogazeta*, 28 July, 1925. The article is quoted in Sargeant, *Classic Films of the Soviet Avant-Garde*, p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in: Kholopova, Valentina, *Sofia Gubaidulina: Putevoditel' po proizvedeniiam*, Moscow: Kompozitor, 2001, pp. 3-4.